



Representative

**Jerome
Delvin**

8th District

Report to the 8th District 2001 Legislative Summary

October 2001

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Dear Friends,

The terrible attacks on the United States last month have brought a new perspective to the challenges Washington legislators faced during the 2001 session.

Between the management of our precious water resources, the needs of our farm families, wrangling over transportation, a deteriorating climate for business statewide, an energy crisis, and the difficulty of reaching agreement in a tied House of Representatives, we had – and still have – our hands full. However, none of these issues can compare to the tragedies that struck our national capital, New York City and rural Pennsylvania. Those who have suffered and our national leaders continue to need our prayers and support.

I went into the session looking for opportunities to protect the priorities of Mid-Columbia residents, increase the efficiency and accountability of state government, and address the issues that affect you and people across our state: water, energy, schools, public safety and more.

It's human nature to focus on the things that were left unfinished during the session. But there was a great deal of progress made on issues important to the citizens of Benton County. This newsletter offers an overview of some of the more significant actions, as well as those that still command our attention. Please take a few minutes to read it, remembering that while our state still has issues to resolve, we should be thankful that as Americans, we have the power to resolve issues and address our citizens' needs through self-governance and elected representation.

Thank you again for the honor of representing you.

Sincerely,

Jerome Delvin



New state budget makes little sense for taxpayers

I began the 2001 session committed to passing a budget that would responsibly fund state government operations into 2003. Unfortunately, the \$22.8 billion state operating budget pushed through by Senate and House Democrats ignored the state's slipping economic condition and taxpayer demands for greater accountability and value for their tax dollars. It already has started unraveling, and in dramatic fashion.

When it was adopted less than four months ago, this budget spent \$667 million more than the state expected to take in, according to the June economic forecast. Now, based on the state's September revenue forecast, that gap has increased to \$761 million in spending beyond expected revenues. The November economic forecast is anticipated to show an additional \$200 to \$500 million drop in state revenues. That would create a \$1 billion shortfall – more than twice the amount of money in the state's rainy-day fund.

The budget spends \$668 million of "one-time" money on ongoing programs. The Democrats also tried to fill a hole in the budget with surplus money from the law enforcement officers' and firefighters' pension fund (LEOFF 1). I couldn't vote for such an irresponsible scheme because I knew it couldn't be sustained without drastic action in a year or two.

I had hoped we might reach a responsible compromise between the smaller, sustainable "reality" budget originally adopted by the House, and the plan adopted by the Senate. But the Senate walked away from efforts to settle the differences. Now, what was a bad budget is only getting worse.

WATER:

New law will bring common-sense management

The importance of water to Benton County can't be overstated. Fortunately, the 2001 session brought us closer to the common-sense management our limited water resources deserve.

I am especially pleased that the language from House Bill 1222, my bill affirming the authority of water conservancy boards, was included in the comprehensive water bill (House Bill 1832) adopted by the Legislature.

That section of the bill clarifies the Legislature's intent when it created water conservancy boards in 1997. It allows conservancy boards to process the same types of water right modifications as the Department of Ecology, with the exception of establishing trust water rights. This will help accelerate the review of water permit applications.

HB 1832 also:

- Creates a "two-line" approach for water rights processing: one line to handle applications for new water rights, and one to process applications for water-right modifications. Up to now, all applications were in the same line, which caused a 7,000-permit backlog.
- Addresses the "use it or lose it" approach traditionally adopted by users who want to maintain their water rights. Now Ecology can accept temporary or permanent donations of water rights to either the Yakima River or the statewide trust water right system.
- Allows local watershed planning units to receive up to \$100,000 in additional grant money from Ecology for planning "instream flows" – the minimum flows or water levels required in a river or stream. This is the first time our state has budgeted for that level of planning.
- Allows changes of family farm water permits from ag-irrigation to other uses. It would increase the number of acres that may be irrigated under a family farm permit, and allow a municipal water system to use a transferred family farm water right.

This is only the first step in what is likely to be several more years of work to make state water code more responsive. But it's a big deal for all residents of the Yakima and Columbia river basins – including farmers, business, local government, even the fish. It supplies the tools government needs to help people and fish get the water they need.



Quad Cities water

Rep. Delvin made sure the House voted on a Senate bill that restored the Quad Cities' place in the state's long line of applicants for water rights permits. On the last day for passing legislation, Senate Bill 5333 still was stalled in the Rules Committee – two weeks after Rep. Delvin and his colleagues on the Agriculture and Ecology Committee had approved it. He managed to have it pulled directly to the House floor for a vote just before the deadline. It passed 82-0.

Report to the 8th District

Tax relief for Washington agriculture

Months of work led to passage of a three-part, \$7.7 million tax relief package for Washington growers. It includes exemptions from sales and use taxes for FDA- or USDA-approved animal pharmaceuticals, and exempts from the state property tax machinery and equipment owned by a farmer and used exclusively to grow agricultural products.

This legislation won't bring an end to farm auctions east of the Cascades, but it will help farmers lower their operating costs.

If we really want to help sustain agriculture, however, let's do something about the regulations that are regulating farmers out of business: the shoreline management rules that are taking farmers' property out of production, and the ergonomics rules that are about to take effect, which represent a tremendous unfunded mandate on growers and processors.

Making it easier to generate new power

It's been a quarter-century since a major commitment to new power generation was made in our state. That caught up with us in the form of an energy crisis that eased with mild summer weather but is sure to return by winter. The answer is more power, which is why I supported the passage of major energy legislation focused on getting new power to our region's energy grid.

The bill (House Bill 2247) addresses the shortsightedness of our state's energy policy during the 1990s, by encouraging construction of new power-generating facilities while promoting renewable energy sources. It won't reduce anyone's power bill in the short term, but it is a long-overdue move that would make it easier to increase our power-generating capacity.

On the generating side, the law cuts state red tape on building bigger power plants. It also would encourage the state's largest power users to build their own on-site power plants, and help older power plants meet environmental regulations so they can operate for longer periods each day.

On the conservation and alternative side, it would encourage better energy management in public buildings, like schools, and require utilities to give their customers the option to buy power from alternative energy sources.

It will take time for these steps to affect your utility bill. In the meantime, I sponsored emergency legislation that made \$5 million available to help low-income families with rising power bills.



Making the juvenile 'boot camp' program better

Rep. Delvin's legislation to strengthen Washington's 120-day "boot camp" program for juvenile offenders was signed into law. It allows the state to keep youths who can't keep up with their "platoon," but are making good progress in the program, for an extra 40 days – hopefully enough time to complete the program and graduate. House Bill 1070 also put more teeth into the penalty for those who violate their parole conditions after leaving boot camp.

The transportation debate: better roads at what cost?

The Legislature did adopt a transportation budget this year. That plan will spend, over the next two years, about \$3.4 billion the state expects to collect from the 23-cent-per-gallon gas tax and other sources. This “current law” budget doesn’t cover new road projects, just maintenance and upgrades to our current roads.

No one appreciates good roads more than Mid-Columbia residents, and I support making new investments in Washington’s transportation infrastructure to help people and products get where they need to go, safely and efficiently. However, the tax package proposed by the governor did not include the assurances and efficiencies I believe taxpayers want.

I do not support just throwing money at the problem as we continue with business as usual. Any new funding package for transportation needs to make sense to citizens statewide, whether or not they were asked to vote on it directly.



Your calls and messages to me made it clear that taxpayers are not in a mood to pay higher transportation taxes unless they are sure that existing dollars are being stretched to the limit. Fortunately, the Legislature did approve long-needed reforms that will significantly change the way transportation projects are managed in our state.

There’s more we can do to make the Department of Transportation move beyond business as usual. But the steps we took will give taxpayers a higher return on the investment they’re making already – no matter what happens with a new-revenue package. That’s important, because I don’t believe the state should ask folks to make a bigger investment in transportation until we can assure them it will be a better investment.

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